

Eight ways to be a better tourist this summer

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In this age of overtourism, locals in popular destinations aren't always rolling out the welcome mat for visitors.

You're excited. Summer's coming and you can't wait to get on that plane and jet off on your vacation. You've been dreaming of sun, sand, sangria, baguettes ... maybe Italians speaking Italian.

The thing is, while you're busy packing, people around the world are bracing themselves for the onslaught of tourists just like you.

Yes, travellers are getting a bad rap these days. Overtourism is the buzzword in popular destinations such as Barcelona, Venice and Dubrovnik. Locals are angry – and many cities are taking steps to limit visitors or penalize ones who misbehave. So here are some tips to minimize the angry glares directed your way – and make your holiday more enjoyable. Some may even save you money.

LEARN THREE KEY PHRASES

At the very least, master how to say “Hello,” “excuse me,” and “thank you” in the native language. If you can’t manage any other phrases, these three will do fine. On my first visit to a café in Prague, I smiled at the waiter and asked for two cappuccinos. “Here, we say *dobry den* [“good day”] when greeting someone” he told me quite harshly. I learned the hard way that most of the world is much more formal than North America and that a greeting is essential when starting a conversation. I also learned that Europeans can be quite direct and that the 10-per-cent tip often included on your bill means that they really don’t care too much about having just insulted you.

REMEMBER THAT PEOPLE LIVE THERE

Try to take public transport outside of peak transport hours. If you’re doing grocery shopping, try not to visit markets at busy times. This is particularly true if you don’t know your way around – people just want to get home and nothing gets a harried resident more upset than a lost tourist getting in their way. Also: if you’re wandering around the city and need to examine your map, pull over to the side. Many travellers either stand there in the middle of the sidewalk or do that slow shuffle while looking around aimlessly. Others will appreciate your consideration.

MAYBE STICK TO WALKING

I’ve seen it countless times: a tourist riding the Bixi bike equivalent down the street in a big city such as Istanbul, weaving around in a way that tells you right away that they rarely ride a bike. People on Segways, clearly not in control, are another example. If you normally don’t ride a bike, it’s not wise to do in a strange city where you are not only a danger to yourself, but also to others.

MIND YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY ETIQUETTE

Ask anyone about the worst travel trends and the words “selfie” and “Instagram” come up at the top. Some common courtesies to remember: don’t tell people to move out of the way, don’t monopolize a spot for your perfect shot, don’t do yoga poses or take inappropriate selfies at war memorials or in front of religious icons, don’t bump others with your gear. If you want to take a photo of someone, strike up a conversation and ask them. Even better, if they’re a vendor or artist on the street, ask permission and leave a tip.

AVOID GROUP THINK

Large tour groups are the travel equivalent to a swarm of locusts. They rush in, take a whole lot of photos, then rush back to the bus to get to their next destination. They don’t try to get to know a place, interact with residents, or spend money in local places. It’s not always possible – but try to travel independently if you can. You might not be able to see 10 cities in seven days, but you will get a deeper experience in each place you visit.

GIVE BACK

Take “free walking tours” run by locals and give a hearty tip, go to independent cafés and not international chains, and don’t over-haggle. When residents see the benefits of tourism they’re much more likely to appreciate visitors.

BE RESPECTFUL

It seems to happen everywhere: young visitors drinking, fighting and throwing up on foreign streets around the world. I lived in Split, Croatia for a year where tourists walk around at 3 a.m., yelling at the top of their lungs and throwing empty beer bottles against walls. Cities have responded by imposing strict fines on drinking in public, bad behaviour and inappropriate dress.

Reminder: You are a guest in someone’s country – as well as an ambassador for yours.

FINALLY, BE ADVENTUROUS

There’s more to Europe than Italy, Spain and France. Some of my most memorable trips have been to places such as Ukraine, Serbia and Georgia. People there are generally happy to receive visitors and you may find yourself having the best vacation ever.